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ABSTRACT

Preparation for American Secondary Schools (PASS) programs designed to prepare 13- to 16-year-old refugees for the transition to American secondary schools have been implemented in the refugee training centers in Thailand and the Philippines. The curriculum emphasizes language and math skills and cultural orientation. Students also develop cross-cultural, interpersonal, and coping skills for their own transition and for their roles as members of a family in transition. Classes run for four hours daily for 20 weeks. Program development was based on knowledge of the students' (all Khmers) educational background, placement testing, and the experiences of English as a second language programs in the United States. The first class graduated from the Thailand program in September 1985, and curriculum development continues based on the experiences of this group both while they were in the program and after their arrival in the United States. (MSE)

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Preparing Refugee Youth for American Secondary School: the PASS Program

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Until recently, adolescents among the refugee population were not involved in the Intensive Program at the three sites in Southeast Asia. They arrived in the U.S. without having had the mandatory exposure to formal English language training and American culture that adult refugees received. Often lacking any previous schooling, the teenagers arrived in the U.S. unfamiliar with school procedures and appropriate social behaviors and were sometimes well behind their American peers in academic achievement.

An important new program, called Preparation for American Secondary Schools (PASS), has been launched in the refugee training centers in Thailand and the Philippines. The goal of the PASS Program is to prepare 13-16 year olds for American secondary school content-areas. Language, math skills, and cultural orientation are emphasized in the curriculum. In addition, students develop cross-cultural, interpersonal, and coping skills that will ease their transition to American life and, specifically, to American schools.

Preparation for the PASS Program began in January 1985 with a planning conference in Washington, D.C. Leaders in the field of refugee youth education and representatives from the voluntary agencies and Indochinese Mutual Assistance Associations met with staffs of the implementing agencies, the Consortium and ICMC, and the Center for Applied Linguistics to identify the essential elements that a training curriculum should include. Following the conference, representatives from the overseas training programs visited schools across the country to talk with teachers and counselors about the specific academic, social, and cultural problems that refugee adolescents face. Educators were eager to give their suggestions about what the camps might do to prepare students for their classrooms. The U.S. educators on the whole stressed the importance of the camp program not trying to teach academic content *per se*. Rather they thought it was important to focus on developing language skills, interaction and interpersonal skills, and basic school skills such as how to work independently, take a test or participate in class. And through the exposure to these skills it was hoped that the adolescents would develop the self-confidence needed to adjust to the American school system. Many schools provided samples of their ESL curricula and other

Refugee students learn about American housing.
Photo by the Consortium staff.

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teaching materials that have been adapted for use with limited-English proficient (LEP) students.

Program Design

Based on the recommendations from U.S. educators and the experience of overseas training programs in teaching ESL and Cultural Orientation (CO), a PASS program design and curriculum framework were developed. The first pilot classes began in April at the Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp.

Students attend class for four hours daily over a 20-week period. There are six 40-minute periods per day, including three periods of ESL, one period of basic math, one period of American studies, and one period of Guidance/CO. To simulate high school procedures, there is a ten-minute homeroom period before classes begin each day and five-minute breaks between classes. Students change classes three times daily and meet with three different teachers. They also have an extracurricular activity period once a week. For this they choose one of several electives offered, such as sports, folk dancing, drawing, or singing.

... various activities are designed to expose students to common school experiences, such as a fire drill, eating in a cafeteria, buying things in a school store, and going to the nurse's clinic.

Over the 20-week period, various activities are designed to expose students to common school experiences, such as a fire drill, eating in a cafeteria, buying things in a school store, and going to the nurse's clinic. Other ways in which the program simulates an American school are by requiring students to do homework, take tests, change classes at the sound of a bell, carry hall passes, and interpret report cards.

The curriculum framework attempts to integrate language and academic skills and concepts with cross-cultural and basic interpersonal skills. The native language is used for conveying cross-cultural information and introducing concepts in content-area units of study, such as geography and consumer education. English language is practiced within the context of the lesson. Academic skills, such as map reading and reference/library skills, are practiced in content-area classes. English language classes focus on vocabulary expansion and listening and reading comprehension skills. Grammatical structures are practiced with academic subject vocabulary, thus reinforcing and complementing content-area instruction.

Placement Testing

Since the overseas training programs had not served the 13- to 16-year-old population previously, little was known about the children's educational background or level of cognitive development. The first 85 PASS students were all Khmer refugees born between 1969 and 1972 – too young to have attended school in Cambodia. Any classroom education they received took place during their one to five years in camps of first asylum, where courses are taught in the students' native language and include reading, writing, math, geography, and health. ESL is not part of the curriculum, though students may have acquired some English language skills through private tutoring or by looking in on adult ESL classes.

PASS placement testing revealed that the majority of the first students were at a low level of English language proficiency. Eighty-five percent were placed at a beginning level; all but three of these students were literate in their native language and were able to copy and sequence letters and numbers. The remaining 15 percent demonstrated basic literacy skills and were placed at an intermediate level. Similar information was obtained by the math skills assessment: beginning students could add and subtract; intermediate students could multiply and divide, but with difficulty.

Curriculum Development

PASS curriculum development began at Phanat Nikhom in mid-March. The curriculum team began by specifying the minimal linguistic, behavioral, and academic competencies required for a junior high-school student to function effectively in a classroom. The team attempted to predict situations in which students would have to deal with others in the new culture and what they would have to do with language in order to effectively manage new situations. Minimal academic or "school" skills were determined by consulting instructional objectives set for the fifth-sixth grade level. Since the PASS pilot program students could not be expected

to catch up to their English-speaking American peers in 20 weeks, priorities for their instruction had to be determined. Curricula collected from various ESL programs in the U.S. proved to be extremely useful in identifying the most important skills to be addressed.

ESL Curriculum

The PASS ESL curriculum attempts to integrate oral competency with other language skills. Three separate classes – ESL, grammar, and reading/writing – are taught daily by the same teacher. Vocabulary and structures are introduced and reinforced over the 20-week period. New structures are introduced with familiar vocabulary; new vocabulary is introduced with already-learned structures. Vocabulary and syntax learned in the ESL classes are used with academic subject vocabulary in American studies and math classes. For example, in their ESL class, students may study language related to the location of rooms in the school, e.g., "The library is next to the cafeteria." In the grammar class, they study prepositions of location. In math, the structure may be reinforced, e.g., "The tens' place is next to the ones' place," and in American studies they may practice using maps, e.g., "Cambodia is next to Thailand."

The ESL curriculum uses competency-based instruction. Listening and speaking skills are emphasized and are based on real-life needs. ESL competencies target specific language goals and build in language to satisfy the need. For example, students often need to identify school personnel or identify a room or places in the school. Their classes instruct them to produce appropriate structures with needed vocabulary: Who's your math teacher? English teacher? Counselor? Where's the gym? Auditorium? Nurse's office? Language functions, e.g., apologizing, asking for clarification, have been integrated into simulated school situations and activities. These functions are woven throughout the curriculum, recurring from one topic to another.

Students entering secondary schools need language for communicative tasks, but they also need language for academic purposes. The grammar class attempts to combine the rule-governed features of the English language with communication objectives. The grammar sequence reinforces the competency-based language as often as possible. For example, if students study language related to expressing their own abilities in the ESL class (e.g., I can draw, I can play the guitar), they study the verb *can* in the grammar class. Target sentence patterns reinforce the ESL lesson and allow for recycling vocabulary from previous lessons.

Grammatical structures are introduced through speaking/listening practice during the first month of instruction. A grammar-based text is introduced in the second month which reviews these grammar patterns. This is done primarily to familiarize students with materials and learning activities of a U.S. classroom. The curriculum writers found it extremely challenging to infuse a grammar sequence into a competency-based curriculum that would also complement the commercially produced basal program.

Three commercial texts with student workbooks are being used with the first PASS cycle. *American Start with English, Book One*, for beginning students, includes 15 grammatical structures and 180 content words. It combines oral work with elementary phonics and preliminary reading. *English for a Changing World, Book One*, for high-beginning and intermediate students, includes a larger number of grammatical structures and vocabulary words. It combines oral work with phonics, sentence stress, and guided reading practice. *Book Two* of that series is used with advanced students. It reviews previously learned structures.

English literacy instruction is linked closely to the students' native language literacy skills and aural-oral English language development. The reading/writing class begins with a literacy skills assessment and follows a progressive sequence of English reading skills. Since most students in the first PASS cycle were familiar only with non-Roman alphabets, initial focus was on developing pre-reading skills and recognizing word meaning and letter patterns. In place of a single textbook, a literacy activities file keys worksheets and classroom strategies to a reading skills continuum. Teachers then select worksheets based on students' mastery of each discrete skill.

In intermediate classes, reading selections reinforce concepts being developed in math and social studies classes. If students are studying health in American studies, for example, they may read a selection on good nutrition in their reading/writing class.

Other Classes

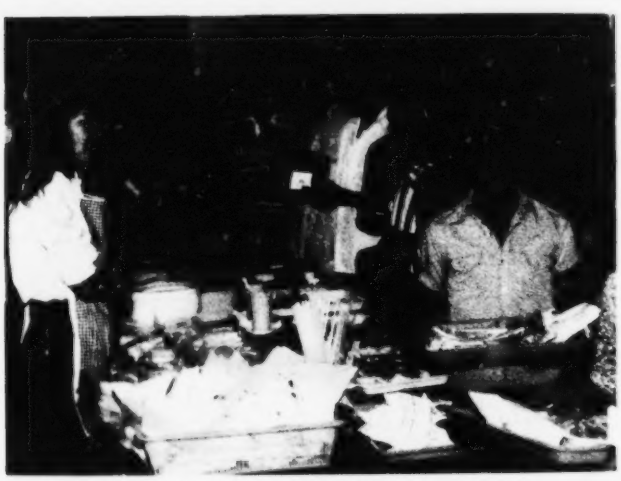
Since adolescent refugees often act as the interpreters of the new culture for their families, the PASS curriculum includes some of the survival competencies found in the adult cultural orientation curriculum. It also includes academic and

behavioral competencies expected of a junior high student. These are dealt with in three separate classes – math, American studies, and Guidance/CO – which are taught daily by the same teacher. Math and American studies expose students to the basic concepts and skills of a U.S. high school curriculum and language related to those content areas. Cultural Orientation focuses on activities which prepare students for the educational system and for the conflicts which may arise as these young people try to meet the expectations of both family and school. Throughout the academic content curriculum, there is an attempt to reinforce the language covered in the ESL curriculum.

The math curriculum uses an activities file similar to the file used in literacy instruction. Worksheets and classroom strategies are keyed to a continuum of computational skills. If students have mastered the basic operational skills, the focus of instruction is on the language related to the operation and solving word problems. If students have not mastered the skills, native language support is used to present the concept and English language practice follows.

The American studies curriculum is structured around one- to two-week units that simulate high school subjects. The unit topics are geography, history, civics, consumerism, home economics, health, human relations, education, and career planning. Activities are designed to expose students to classroom materials such as maps, globes, and charts. Slides, videotapes, and other media are used to give students a sense of participating in real U.S. school environments.

The Guidance/CO gives students an opportunity to talk about the information and concepts conveyed in American studies. The class emphasizes the acquisition of interpersonal and cross-cultural skills through such topics as decision-making, changing family roles, and exploring options. Classroom activities allow students to discuss possible points of cultural and social conflict and to identify ways of solving problems.



Students line up for lunch in the simulated cafeteria.

Photo by the Consortium staff.

Simulation Activities

Simulation activities are an integral part of the curriculum and provide a means of assessing student progress towards unit objectives. Teachers and supervisors plan simulations together to determine behavioral and linguistic tasks. Students receive immediate feedback after the simulation activities, so they will know which areas have been mastered and which need further attention. Some of the simulations planned for the first PASS cycles include a cafeteria lunch, a special assembly, and parent-teacher conferences.

As a means of providing U.S. schools with useful information about a student's previous educational experience and academic skill level, the curriculum team also drafted a skills inventory that accompanies the student to the new school. This document simulates a student transfer or cumulative file. It contains general information about the student's personal and educational background, pertinent medical information, and a checklist of the basic English, academic, and computational skills the student has mastered.

PASS Program at Bataan*

In June of this year, the PASS program was approved for inclusion at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center at Bataan and construction of appropriate school and auxiliary buildings began in July. In planning for PASS implementation in September, the PRPC reviewed what has taken place in the U.S. and in Phanat Nikhom, keeping in mind that the target population includes groups other than Khmer. The PRPC not only serves Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese refugees from first asylum camps, but also Vietnamese and Amerasians who are coming directly from Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program. The ethnic diversity of the students at the PRPC and their wide variety of backgrounds have distinct implications for curriculum development; the students' range of English

*The next issue of *Passage* will include an update on PASS program implementation at the PRPC at Bataan.

skills and varied language and education backgrounds will require that major readjustments and additions be made to the curriculum developed in Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp. Some of the Amerasian students in particular present unique challenges. These students will be integrated into the overall PASS program, but it is recognized that they have special needs which have been taken into account in program planning.

Conclusion

The first group of PASS students graduated from the program at Phanat Nikhom in September 1985. Much has been learned about the training needs of 13- to 16-year-old refugees in a relatively short time, and initial steps have been taken in identifying the skills, information, and attitudes these children need in order to make a smooth transition from camps in Southeast Asia to secondary schools in the U.S. Staffs are currently developing training approaches and teaching techniques that are most effective with this new group of students. As feedback is received from the refugees, U.S. educators, and other service providers, the curriculum will evolve to address stateside concerns.

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